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STUDENT ORGANIZATIONS IN A HIGH SCHOOL

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From the large number of questionnaire circulars that are received in the office of the principal of a high school, and from the statements which one sees in educational papers, one is led to believe that the management of student organizations in high schools is a very difficult matter. It may be of interest to explain the plan of conducting these organizations in the High School of Trenton, and in doing so I wish to acknowledge my indebtedness to suggestions made to me some five years ago by Mr. I. W. Travell, the principal of the high school at Plainfield, N. J.

Every student organization in our high school is under the care of a faculty director, and, of course, the success of this arrangement depends on the wisdom and tact that he displays. If he poses as an autocrat, he will get into trouble, and so will the organization. If he acts as an elder advisor, the pupils will soon know that the arrangement works to their benefit, and the average American has sense enough to know where his own interests lie. One feature that has helped us to direct some of our student organizations, namely, those involving the expenditure of money, is that the principal has an independent source of income through a lunch-room which the school conducts, the proceeds of which are entirely at the disposal of the faculty. There is a faculty treasurer, who handles all school money, for whatever purpose it may be raised. There are student treasurers of the various organizations, but they do not hold any money in their names. All money collected by them is turned over to the faculty treasurer, and all bills of whatsoever nature are paid by him. This arrangement prevents the financial tangle of student organizations about which one reads. Once a year a complete statement of the finances of the school is published. It is almost a criminal act to allow the irresponsible management of student finances which one reads about in school magazines. Irre-

sponsibility here means carelessness, and carelessness in financial accounts is the first step toward dishonesty. It is a serious matter to contemplate that a high school may through its student organizations become a school of training in dishonesty.

There are in our high school two musical organizations, a mandolin club and an orchestra. The mandolin club is in charge of a local teacher of the mandolin. The pupils pay him for his services. We discourage the acceptance of engagements outside of school, and charge a fee when the club does accept an engagement. The object of this is not to raise money, but to discourage engagements. Whatever money is received in this way is applied to the expenses of the club, and does not reach any individual member of the club. Our school orchestra is in charge of the director of music in the high school. The same general arrangement holds as with the mandolin club, except that instruction in the orchestra is free. Both of these clubs appear at frequent intervals before the school.

Every division in the high school, except those of the senior class, is organized into a literary society, which meets during the last period on Friday afternoon. The class teacher acts as general critic and adviser. In most cases, however, the students elect their own officers, including a society critic, but the teacher is present at every meeting of the society. While there is a program committee, the teacher constantly makes his influence felt in the shaping of the program. Any special work which the principal may desire in these societies is sent to the teacher, who sees to it that the work is done in the society; yet I am sure the young people feel that a great deal of freedom is allowed to them in the management of these societies. The presence of the class teacher guarantees the good conduct of all business. The senior class is divided into two literary societies, which hold an annual public contest. The faculty critics of these societies select the contestants.

We have a magazine managed by an editorial board appointed by a committee of the faculty for a term of one year. A member of the faculty sits with the members of the board at their various meetings, exercises care over the selection of suitable material for publication in the magazine, and in general simply gives the young people the benefit of his wider experience in conducting such affairs.

Here, too, there is friendly co-operation. We have every positive testimony that the members of the editorial board would consider it a great loss if the office of faculty director were abolished.

We have an athletic association, and a faculty director who looks after this organization. We have a constitution in which there are provisions for regulating our athletics. No person is eligible to a position on any team unless he is in regular attendance at the high school, and has the approval of the principal. There is an executive committee of the association, of which the faculty director is president *ex officio*. He has control of all the property of the association, and no athletic contest of any kind can be scheduled without his permission. He accompanies the teams on their trips. He holds the respect of the boys, and in the final analysis his word is law. The constitution of the athletic association was framed with a view to keeping the control of athletics in the hands of the faculty. When the constitution was adopted a few years ago, a clause was inserted that any amendment must receive the approval of the faculty director before it may be adopted by the organization. Here, too, an autocrat would cause trouble, but a man who knows how to manage boys will soon show them that their interests lie in the direction of co-operation with one who knows more than they do about the management of athletics. The fact that we have a fund of money, from independent sources, with which to help the athletic association, naturally brings the boys to us when they contemplate anything involving the expenditure of money, and is therefore a source of power. To ascertain the feeling of our own students concerning the office of faculty director, I asked a number of them to state their views in writing, on the following topics: first, the advantages and disadvantages of this plan of conducting student organizations; secondly, whether in the opinion of the students the office of faculty director in our high school should be abolished. No one would say that the office should be abolished. A senior boy, fearing that plans were under consideration working toward abolishing this office, wrote a very spirited defense of the plan.

The following are given as advantages to the literary societies resulting from the office of faculty director:

1. It results in serious effort to carry out the purpose of the society; it elevates the work to a dignified plane.

2. The pupils receive much valuable criticism, and accept the plain truth more readily from the faculty director than from their fellow-pupils.

3. Pupils cannot shirk and allow a few to do all the work. All take their turn.

4. "We value him for the help he is to us."

5. "We want him, not to maintain order; that there would be without him; not merely to criticise, but because his presence works toward the welfare of the society."

Among the advantages to the Magazine of the high school resulting from this office, as given by the pupils, are the following:

1. "So far have we not had some teacher overseeing our undertakings, and have they not always been successful? Then why should we change?"

2. "Pupils are more willing to submit articles for the school paper when they know the work must be approved by a faculty adviser, because they know that their own names will not appear in public in any discreditable way."

3. "Surely it is better to have some competent hand stronger than ours to guide us."

The replies were equally emphatic for the retention of the faculty director for the athletic association. One says that the withdrawal of faculty control would be a serious disaster to the welfare of the athletics of our school. It would result in shortage of funds, which would mean that our teams would be compelled to meet inferior teams, because we could play only those teams in our vicinity. Another says: "Athletics thrive under maturer judgment, better than under the unstable control of the students. Since athletics did not thrive before this faculty control began, where is there enough reason to justify a change back to the former student control?" Another says: "Before the system was instituted, all of our athletic ventures, though having a very auspicious beginning, suffered an early death." Another adds: "Our athletic adviser does not let our enthusiasm at the beginning of a season become too strong, but makes it extend throughout the entire year."

It can readily be seen from the character of these statements that there is not the feeling of uneasiness in the minds of pupils

with reference to faculty direction that many principals fear. Young people need leaders, and generally know when they are led in the right direction. It is the opinion of the writer that in our country the habit of right action should be thoroughly formed before we try to develop the habit of independent action. The life of a high school as manifested through its social organizations is second in importance only to the work of the school curriculum. Here the future citizen learns to act with his fellows. Here he learns many valuable lessons in the art of government. The essential elements of any public office are power and responsibility. Through the faculty director, the pupil learns to use power aright, knowing that he will be held strictly accountable for all that he does.